

Deco hotel owner may raze landmark

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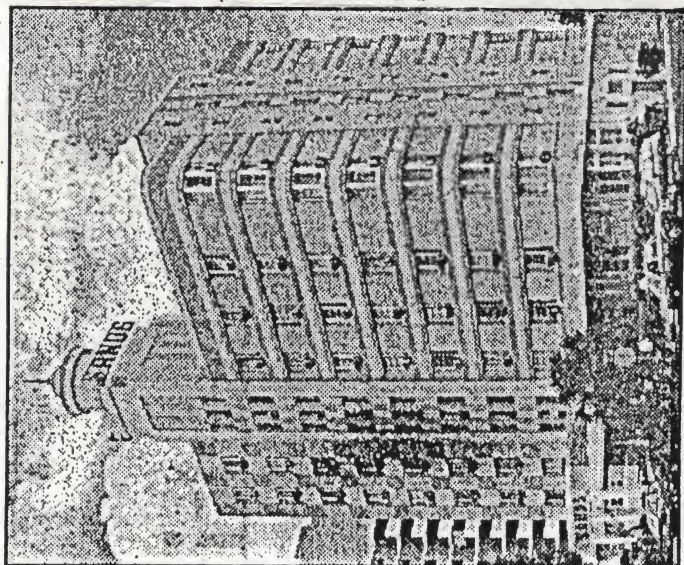
Owners of The Sands Hotel, one of Miami Beach's "signature Art Deco" structures, were securing the permits Monday required to demolish it.

Historic preservationists, legally helpless to block the demolition, predicted the hotel would become a martyr to weaknesses in the city's preservation ordinance.

The Sands is the first Art Deco hotel threatened with demolition since The Senator was knocked down in 1988 to make room for a parking lot.

The hotel is owned by Baltimore businessman and investor John Driggs, who bought it in 1990 from a partnership including Miami Beach Commissioner Abe Resnick and his son James. Driggs didn't return phone calls Monday. But James Resnick, who has worked to obtain the demolition permits, said Driggs intends to acquire the final permit "very soon, within

PLEASE SEE SANDS HOTEL, 2B



SANDS HOTEL: Baltimore owner John Driggs bought Art Deco hotel in 1990.

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SHOTEL, FROM 1B

weeks." The hotel, 1601 Collins Ave., is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, although it was left off the city's historic district in 1965 after one of the Resnicks' business partners argued against adding it.

"I don't understand what the problem is," James Resnick said today. "It's not an historic build-

ing and it's not in the historic district."

Because the hotel isn't in the district, preservationists can't stop the demolition, acknowledged Nancy Liebman, director of the Miami Design Preservation League.

"They have every legal right to do it," said Liebman. "This is going to be the sacrificial lamb that will show the community what can happen under our current laws.... It's like a rerun of an old movie. It's just

going to be another disgrace for Miami Beach to lose one of its signature Art Deco hotels."

The Resnicks hold a mortgage on the Sands, sold in February 1990 for \$5.6 million. Records show the outstanding mortgage at the time was \$4.42 million.

Driggs owns a construction company and is a leading businessman in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. areas.

"They still owe us a small mort-

g final demolition permit

gage," said Commissioner Resnick. "I'm not sure how much, I don't really have a lot to do with that. Our interest is when they start building, then they have to pay off the mortgage."

Resnick was the only dissenting vote in 1986 when the commission voted to form the historic district. But in recent years he has expressed support for preservation efforts, and promised during his reelection campaign this year to fight

to save Art Deco architecture.

On Monday, he compared the \$992,000 assessed value of the Sands structure to the \$2.3 million value of the land beneath it.

"That tells you the story right there," Resnick said. "The building is practically worthless."

Liebman and architect Bernard Zyscovich disagree.

"The value of this property, apart from its history and architectural character and its role in maintaining

the scale of the block and the neighborhood, is that it's really ideally suited for renovation," Zyscovich said.

The Sands was designed in 1939 by architect Roy F. France, who also designed such Beach landmarks as the neighboring St. Moritz and the Versailles at 3425 Collins Ave.

Abe Resnick said Monday that when Driggs bought the Sands, the developer planned to build a 600-room convention hotel.